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ABSTRACT

A telephone interview survey was conducted to determine the reasons some Maine schools have chosen not to implement Reading Recovery, despite the program's statewide support and continued financial support toward training costs from the Maine Department of Education. Out of 72 selected schools, 47 participated, for a response rate of 65%. A stratified random sample ensured that the schools were both small and large, from both rural and non-rural communities. Some respondents reported that they were planning to implement Reading Recovery in the future. Eight other schools had in place locally designed programs that reportedly were based on or similar to Reading Recovery. Title I was the most common alternative program among schools not planning to implement Reading Recovery. A wide variety of reasons were uncovered for choosing programs other than Reading Recovery. The primary reason given was financial, but a number of small schools reported not having a need or having only a minimal need for a program such as Reading Recovery. On average, the programs in place for helping at-risk first graders learn to read received positive ratings from respondents. (NKA)

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"If It's Such a Great Program, Why Haven't All the Schools Implemented It?"

Barriers to Full Statewide Implementation of Reading Recovery in Maine

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Executive Summary

- A telephone interview study was conducted to determine the reasons some Maine schools have chosen not to implement Reading Recovery, despite the program's statewide support and continued financial support toward training costs from the Maine Department of Education.

- Forty-seven (47) out of 72 selected schools participated, for a response rate of 65%. A stratified random sample ensured that the schools were both small and large, from both rural and non-rural communities.

- Some respondents reported that they were planning to implement Reading Recovery in the future. Eight other schools had in place locally-designed programs that reportedly were based on or similar to Reading Recovery.

- Title I is the most common alternative program among schools not planning to implement Reading Recovery.

- A wide variety of reasons were uncovered for choosing programs other than Reading Recovery. The primary reason given for not choosing Reading Recovery was financial, but a number of small schools reported to have no need or a very minimal need for a program such as Reading Recovery.

- On average, the programs in place for helping at-risk first graders learn to read received positive ratings from respondents

If It's Such a Great Program, Why Haven't All the Schools Implemented It?
Barriers to Full Statewide Implementation of Reading Recovery in Maine

Reading Recovery (Clay, 1982, 1985, 1991) is an early intervention program for first grade children at risk for literacy failure. Even with good classroom instruction, there are often a small number of first grade children in each classroom who have a difficult time keeping up right from the start. It is these children, roughly 20% of a first grade classroom (Pinnell, DeFord, & Lyons, 1988), that Reading Recovery targets. Often these children have not had much experience with books and written language prior to entering school. Even naming letters or writing their own names can be a challenge. Most of these children, through Reading Recovery, can accelerate to the skill level of their peers before the end of first grade. The program involves an intensive, individualized, one-on-one session with the Reading Recovery teacher for 30 minutes a day, every school day, until the child is reading and writing at the level of his or her classmates. On average, this takes between 12 and 20 weeks, but the length of time children spend in the program varies widely depending on the needs of each child.

Since its introduction in Maine in 1991-92, the Reading Recovery program has grown by almost a factor of ten. However, as shown in

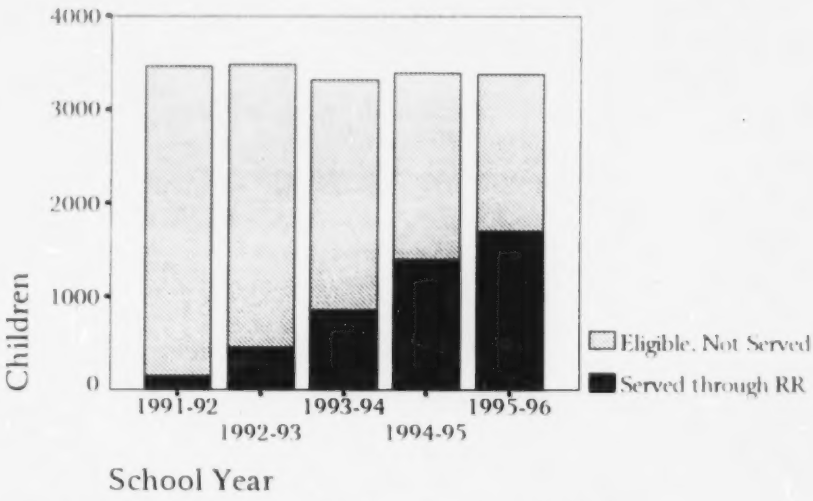

Figure 1. Implementation of Reading Recovery in Maine.

Figure 1, the Reading Recovery program is not yet meeting the needs of all the first grade children in Maine who are estimated to be at risk for literacy difficulties (based on the expectation that about 20% of each first grade class is at risk). This gap is partially attributable to some schools that have not yet implemented the program and partially attributable to a lower-than-adequate level of implementation in other schools. Not all schools with Reading Recovery have enough Reading Recovery teachers to accommodate all at-risk first graders.

Quantitative data have demonstrated the effectiveness of the program in helping initially low-achieving students achieve literacy skills at the level of their classmates (Rhodes-Kline, 1995b, 1996b). Qualitative data from school districts that have implemented Reading Recovery reflect very positive reactions to the program from teachers, administrators, and parents (Rhodes-Kline, 1995a, 1996a). Over the past five years, efforts to increase the availability of Reading Recovery to all children in Maine have included a significant financial investment by the Maine Department of Education for the training of Reading Recovery teachers. Many Maine schools have taken advantage of this paid training, but not all have. Maine policy makers, educational leaders, and teachers, particularly those in the area of early literacy, may be interested to know the reasons the program has not been implemented in all schools across the state. A telephone interview study was conducted to address this and related questions.

Methods

A telephone interview survey was deemed the most appropriate method of finding out why some Maine schools have not implemented Reading Recovery programs. Using databases compiled from Reading Recovery teacher self-report data, a list of schools with first grade classrooms that did not have a Reading Recovery program at the beginning of the 1996-97 school year was compiled. For purposes of the study, a Reading Recovery school was defined as one that employed at least a part-time officially trained and approved Reading Recovery teacher.

Schools were categorized as either large or small (those having more or less than 100 students) and as being rural or non-rural (using a population of 5,000 as the approximate cutoff). There are not enough urban communities in Maine to have accommodated the full range of population diversity, from urban to rural, so a cutoff was chosen that would separate communities of sufficient size to support at least one part-time Reading Recovery teacher (i.e., with at least one first grade classroom of about 20 students) from smaller communities. It should be noted that "non-rural" in this study encompasses everything from small town to small city.

A stratified random sample was chosen by randomly selecting 20 schools in each of four categories: large schools in non-rural settings, large schools in rural settings, small schools in non-rural settings and small schools in rural settings. Eight known Reading Recovery schools (1 small non-rural, 5 large non-rural, and 2 small rural) were inadvertently included in the sample. Unfortunately, this error was discovered after most of the interviews were completed. These eight schools were dropped from the data. The resulting data pool consisted of 72 schools.

Telephone interviews were conducted in March and April, 1997. The interviewer was a certified principal who was able to talk to principals with an administrator's knowledge of

schools. She is also a reading specialist who could accurately report and categorize various ways to meet children's reading needs. Because she is also familiar with Reading Recovery, Title I and other reading programs in Maine schools, she could tactfully field unexpected responses, answer questions, and collect more accurate information. Use of a narrative format allowed the responder to give complete, open-ended responses in his or her own words.

Survey questions were initially directed to the principal of the school. The interviewer gave him or her the opportunity to respond or make a referral to the most appropriate person. If three calls yielded no response, a school was categorized as not responding to the survey. The speaking protocol consisted of a brief explanation of the project and a list of five questions that could be answered within five or ten minutes. After introducing herself to the initial contact person, the interviewer explained the purpose of the research and plans for dissemination of results. Then the interviewer clarified who would be the most appropriate person to respond to the survey for that school.

Results

In all, forty-seven (47) out of the seventy-two (72) schools were successfully contacted, for a response rate of 65%. All those contacted agreed to provide data. Nine were small, rural schools, sixteen were large, rural schools, twelve were small non-rural schools, and ten were large non-rural schools. Table 1 gives details about the sample.

Table 1. Schools in the Sample.

	Large	Small
Non-Rural		
Responded	**10**	**12**
No Response	5	7
Total	*15*	*19*
Rural		
Responded	**16**	**9**
No Response	4	9
Total	*20*	*18*

What literacy programs do you have in place for first grade children needing extra help with reading and writing?

Many different answers were received from schools to the first question, "What literacy programs do you have in place for first grade children needing extra help with reading and writing?" The answers fell roughly into six kinds of programs. First, **Reading Recovery-like** programs used or claimed to use similar strategies and/or structures to the Reading Recovery program, but the teachers did not have Reading Recovery training, nor were they supported with data analysis or formal supervision through the official Reading Recovery program. For example, *Reading Discovery* is a program that one large rural school in Maine is using. The representative we spoke with explained that this program was based on the theories and work of Marie Clay

(who developed Reading Recovery). Another school (small and non-rural) reported to be using a program called *Positive Partners* which was based on Reading Recovery, but in which educational technicians provided the one-on-one tutoring. In some cases, the teachers in "Reading Recovery-like" programs have taken courses in early literacy that cover the theoretical basis for Reading Recovery.

Some schools reported that their program for children at risk of literacy failure is **Title I**. Title I is a national entitlement program for literacy. The federal government allocates financial resources to schools based on the numbers of children who receive free or reduced lunches (a measure of financial need, which is related to low literacy levels in communities). Schools have some latitude in choosing how to allocate Title I monies, and a number of programs, including Reading Recovery, qualify. However, when a school says, "we have a Title I program," they usually mean that they use the standard model for their Title I program. In this model, educational technicians or literacy specialists tutor children needing extra assistance in literacy. One school reported a variation on this in which the tutoring was done by local college students. Sometimes tutoring in a Title I program is one-on-one, and sometimes it is small group assistance. One major difference between the standard Title I model and Reading Recovery is that Reading Recovery teachers receive applied training in validated teaching procedures specifically designed for the first grade at-risk population. Another important difference is that systematic observation techniques are used every day in Reading Recovery to measure children's strengths, areas of need, and progress, as well as for thorough program evaluation.

Another category of responses included programs with an emphasis on phonics-based instruction. Programs that emphasize **phonics** give children instruction in what sounds letters and

letter-combinations represent. Phonics breaks the skills of reading and writing down into individual letters and sounds. Answers in this category included Open Court, ARL, and Wilson. While phonics is an important component, Reading Recovery is a balanced literacy program.

Another category of responses included the use of **literacy groups** to help at-risk children gain needed skills. This intervention allows some portion of the child's day to be dedicated to reading in a small group (with maybe 3 or 4 other children) supervised by a teacher or educational technician. Children in the group take turns reading for some of the time, and the adult supports the children when they encounter difficulty by prompting for reading strategy use. This is an instructional technique often used by schools in combination with Reading Recovery, especially with children who are on the waiting list for Reading Recovery. The emphasis on learning literacy skills by reading real books is congruent with the Reading Recovery program.

Some schools indicated that they already had or were implementing **Reading Recovery** in the coming school year. (These were in addition to the eight known Reading Recovery schools that were dropped from the data set, as described in the Methods section.) If a respondent indicated that his or her school had or was definitely getting Reading Recovery for the upcoming school year, the interview ended there. (We were only interested in gathering data from schools that had not implemented the program.) Table 2 presents the findings.

Table 2 Programs in Place

What literacy programs do you have in place for first grade children needing extra help with reading and writing?

Program type	Total	Large Rural	Small Rural	Large Non-Rural	Small Non-Rural
Generic Title I	23	10	3	3	7
Reading Recovery*	8	2	3	2	1
Reading Recovery-like program	8	2	1	2	3
Phonics program	2	2			
Literacy Groups	1				1
Other	2		2		
None	3			3	
Total	47	16	9	10	12

*__Note__: Although the survey targeted schools that had not implemented Reading Recovery, some of the schools selected either had the program in place, or were in the process of implementing it for the upcoming year. It should be noted that the number of schools with Reading Recovery in this table in no way reflects the state as a whole (i.e., hundreds of schools in Maine have implemented Reading Recovery to date). They are presented here for completeness of the study results.

What made you choose the programs now in place?

Answers to the second question could be grouped roughly into nine different categories of responses. The first three categories were attributions for who made the decision. Some representatives said that it was a **system or district decision** (implying that the school may not have been active in the choice.) Others indicated that it was an **administrative decision** (indicating that teachers were not part of the decision.) Still others indicated that the decision was made as a result of **teacher initiative.**

Other responses spoke to the thought processes that led to the decision. Some reported that the decision had been made on **financial** grounds, that there was either not enough money for what the school really wanted (which may or may not have been Reading Recovery), or that there

was outside money for what they chose (making it hard to say no) Still other school representatives indicated that loyalty played a role Some felt **loyal to a current "established" program** or an attitude of not wanting to change Others were **loyal to current employees** (who might have been removed if a program were changed) Others felt **loyal to an administrator** or teacher who had developed the program they were currently using Finally, some representatives cited the **method or philosophy** of the program they had chosen, while others cited the **research results** See Table 3

Table 3 Why Programs Other Than Reading Recovery Were Chosen

What made you choose the program(s) now in place?	Total	Large Rural	Small Rural	Large Non-rural	Small Non-rural
(Who Decided)					
Administrative Decision	7	2	1	1	3
System/ District Decision	4	1		2	1
Teacher Initiative	4	2	1	1	
(Reasons)					
Method/ Philosophy of Program	5	3	1	1	
Loyal to Current "Established" Program	4	1	1		2
Financial Reasons	3	1	1	1	
Loyal to Current Employees	2			1	1
Loyal to Developer of Program	1	1			
Research Results	1				1
Balanced program	1	1			
No reason given	7	2	1	1	3
Total	39	14	6	8	11

Note: Numbers in this table and the tables that follow are smaller than numbers for the total sample because some of the schools called had recently implemented Reading Recovery or were implementing it for the upcoming year. (See Table 2).

What is your definition of a good program?

Respondents were asked to give their definition of a "good program" as a primer for the next question, which asked them to rate their current program on a scale from 1 to 5. The results from this primer question proved to be interesting as well. Thirteen different types of responses were received. Definitions ranged from philosophical underpinnings to straight outcomes.

Many responses spoke to the philosophy and/or assumptions of a good program. Some respondents named **outcomes**, such as "success rates with students." Others specified **outcomes for *all* children**. Some said that a good program **supports classroom efforts**. Other responses indicated that a good program is **individualized** and targeted to the at-risk child's specific needs.

Some responded based on other characteristics or components of a good program. Some said that a good program used **trained people** to deliver the instruction, and others said the defining characteristic was that it was implemented at an **early age**.

Interestingly, many of the characteristics of Reading Recovery (an outcomes-based, individualized, intense program which uses highly trained educators, and is implemented at an early age) were named. Two respondents specifically said that a good program was "Reading Recovery or a similar program". Table 4 presents these data.

Table 4. Definitions of a Good Program

What is your definition of a good program?					
	Total	Large Rural	Small Rural	Large Non-rural	Small Non-rural
Individualized/ Targeted to needs	6	2	1	2	1
Supports classroom instruction	5	3		2	
Time is what counts	5	1	1	1	2
Success rate with students	4	1		1	2
Multi-sensory/ phonemic awareness	3	1			2
Continuity through the years	2	1			1
Focus on early age	2		1	1	
Good for all children	2	1			1
Reading Recovery or similar	2	1		1	
Trained personnel	2	1			1
Balanced program	1	1			
Concentrated instruction	1				1
Produces independent learners	1		1		
None given	1	1			
Total	37	14	4	8	11

How effective are the intervention(s) you have on a scale of 1 - 5 with 1 being "not a very good program" and 5 being "a very good program?"

The highest average rating was for Reading Recovery-like programs ($\bar{X}$ = 4.38, n = 8). The schools with generic Title I programs came in second with an average rating of 4.08 (n = 18). Table 5 summarizes the responses.

It is interesting to note results from a previous report (Rhodes-Kline, 1996a) in which parents, administrators, and teachers in schools with Reading Recovery were asked to rate Reading Recovery on the same scale. On average, administrators rated the program 4.8, classroom teachers rated it 4.7, and parents rated it 4.9.

Table 5. Perceived Effectiveness.

How would you rate the effectiveness of your current intervention(s)?
(On a scale from 1 to 5, 1 = "not a very good program," 5 = "a very good program")

Program type	Average Rating	Minimum	Maximum	Valid N
Reading Recovery*	4.80*	-	-	-
Reading Recovery-like program	4.38	3.0	5.0	8
Generic Title I	4.08	2.5	5.0	18
Phonics program	4.00	4.0	4.0	1
Literacy Groups	3.50	3.5	3.5	1
Other	4.00	4.0	4.0	2
None	4.00	4.0	4.0	2
Total				32

*From previous research (administrators)

Why has your school not implemented Reading Recovery?

The last question asked respondents why their school had not chosen Reading Recovery. The most common reason was limited financial resources, which was named by 18 schools (12 large rural; 2 small rural; 3 large non-rural; 1 small non-rural). The second most common reason, named by 6 small schools, was minimal or no need for the program. Five of the schools we called were planning or considering implementation of Reading Recovery in the near future (but not for the upcoming year). Three of the respondents said they considered Reading Recovery too much money for too few students. Other reasons varied. Table 6 gives the responses.

Table 6. Reasons Schools Have Not Implemented Reading Recovery

Why has your school not implemented Reading Recovery?

Program type	Total	Large Rural	Small Rural	Large Non-rural	Small Non-rural
Limited financial resources	18	12	2	3	1
No need/ minimal need	6		2		4
Considering or planning to implement RR in the future	5			2	3
Too much money for too few students	3			1	2
Philosophical difference (wrong group targeted)	1			1	
Want a program for all children	1				1
No training site nearby	1	1			
Don't want employees to lose jobs			1		
No reason given	1	1			
Total	37	14	5	7	11

Conclusion

Many schools (8 of those sampled) that have not implemented Reading Recovery have chosen to implement a program that they describe as similar to or based on Reading Recovery. Support for the goals and methods of Reading Recovery, in fact, was very high. Support for Reading Recovery has been very strong from parents, teachers, and administrators in schools that have implemented the program. Findings from this study indicate that support for the program is prevalent even among schools that have not chosen to implement it.

Among schools that have not implemented the program, the primary reason is financial. Although the Maine Department of Education has devoted considerable resources to paying for Reading Recovery teacher training, the program is still perceived to be out of reach by some schools, especially large elementary schools in rural areas. The largest expense that a school bears for the program is the salary of the Reading Recovery teacher. In many cases, Title I funds cover this teacher's salary. However, some schools may feel they cannot spare half of an existing (Title I) teacher's time for Reading Recovery, and they may be reluctant to reallocate scarce Title I funds to just the primary level. Some schools that do not receive Title I funds may feel they cannot cover an additional teacher.

Minimal need was a reason named by a number of small schools. A part-time Reading Recovery teacher typically serves 6-8 Reading Recovery children per year. Not all schools are large enough to have this many at-risk first graders. A school that only has 1 or 2 first grade children who are behind the rest of the class may have some need for the program, but administrators are probably correct in their assessment that the school does not have enough need to justify even a part-time a Reading Recovery teacher.

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